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If your child, after reading or hearing this, commits
suicide or kills or hurts anyone else
(or if you are a child and do), if the postman or some
deliverer of flyers for pizza houses,
custom drainpipe makers and chimney sweeps becomes so
startled as to slip and fall,
even if such person's back should be broken, resulting in
paralysis, it's not my problem.

This poem is bland as water stew, innocent as a zygote,
non-threatening as a turtle in its shell,
innocuous as a dirt-clod in a woods where no one goes.
It scarcely exists, there is so little to it,
and what there is, is pure coincidence, the most
unpremeditated happenstance.
It's all just poetry, just words, just a collection of
phonemes, just random noises made by forcing
air across a larynx, or interpreting firings of an optic
nerve. It means nothing.
It does nothing. It causes nothing, makes nothing happen.
The poet is not an "unacknowledged legislator
of the world." The poet who said poets were that was a
kook. This poet could not get elected
unacknowledged dogcatcher on the basis of his poetry. He
could not get elected unacknowledged dogcatcher
even if he came up with a more original office to which
he could not get elected on the basis of his poetry.
If he had to make a living with his poetry, he could not
have written this: he would be dead.
If he'd had to buy even a single lunch with the lifetime
proceeds of his poetry,
he'd have had to get the special, even if it was liver
and onions, which he abhors.
Blame the culture: blame the decline in U.S. literacy:
blame your high school English teacher,
your college prof: blame movies, video games, MTV: blame
all the boring, incomprehensible poets past and present
for the abject, utter, unabated impotence of poetry.
Whatever isn't working in your life,
your friends' and family's lives, your neighborhood, city,
county, state, country, continent, planet, solar system,
galaxy, universe, it's not my fault. I didn't do it.
I'm only the poet. Don't blame me.

— Charles Webb

Los Angeles CA